

Continuity of rural family properties by generation transfer

Continuidade das propriedades rurais familiares por meio da transferência geracional

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ABSTRACT: Discussions concerning rural family succession have occurred more frequently due to different factors such as rural exodus, an aging rural population and loss of existing knowledge in a farm when there is none. We propose to analyze publications on succession in rural properties, highlighting its relationship with rural development. For this, the proposal of Fink (2010) was used as a framework for the systematic review of peer-reviewed journals. One can identify that succession in rural space is a complex action that occurs in different ways, and is influenced by individual issues. Moreover, in many cases, the current manager finds it difficult to understand the need to reduce and subsequently stop his/her work activities so that the successor can continue the management of the property. Moreover, succession planning is necessary in order to achieve a greater success in this process. Succession contributes to the continuity of traditional activities in the rural space, that is, food production.

Keywords: Continuity of traditional rural activities. Population aging. Rural development. Sustainability of property.

RESUMO: As discussões sobre a sucessão familiar rural têm ocorrido com mais frequência por diversos fatores, como êxodo rural, envelhecimento da população rural e perda do conhecimento existente em uma propriedade quando não há nenhum sucessor para dar continuidade às atividades. Desta forma, propomos analisar publicações sobre sucessão em propriedades rurais, destacando sua relação com o desenvolvimento rural. Para tanto, utilizou-se a proposta de Fink (2010) como referencial para a revisão sistemática de periódicos revisados por pares. Pode-se identificar que a sucessão no espaço rural é uma ação complexa que ocorre de diferentes formas e é influenciada por questões individuais. Além disso, em muitos casos, o atual gestor tem dificuldade em compreender a necessidade de reduzir e, posteriormente, interromper as suas atividades laborais para que o sucessor possa dar continuidade à gestão da propriedade. Além disso, o planejamento da sucessão é necessário para obter maior sucesso neste processo. A sucessão contribui para a continuidade das atividades tradicionais do espaço rural, ou seja, a produção de alimentos.

Palavras-chave: Continuidade das atividades rurais tradicionais. Desenvolvimento rural. Envelhecimento da população. Sustentabilidade da propriedade.

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INTRODUCTION

Family property is considered a symbol of rural space. Correlated to part of its history, there is the history of the family that holds ownership of the property for a long time. This is because of the management of the businesses passed on from generation to generation (LOBLEY; BAKER, 2012). In this way, by remaining a landowner, the individual maintains the family legacy (PRINCE; CONN, 2012). Being a rural producer can be considered a professional heritage (POTTER; LOBLEY, 1996). However, succession in rural properties is perceived as a complex question. The decision to transfer a property to a successor may be influenced by economic and social factors (LEONARD *et al.*, 2017). In addition to such a complexity, there is the need for a continuous process that results in the transfer of duties and asset management to the successor (STEIER; MILLER, 2010; BOYD *et al.*, 2014).

Succession in any type of business needs to be planned in the long term, avoiding frustrations regarding the results (HOR *et al.*, 2010). The rural property manager cannot choose a successor in critical situations because this process depends on the interaction between the owner, the successor and the property (FISCHER, BURTON, 2014). Succession planning is important to a successfully succession. Such planning will grant experience to the successor in relation to activities assigned to the business manager (HOR *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the manager must share and then transfer to the successor his/her activities related to rural property. Given this context, managerial succession and retirement are related (CONWAY *et al.*, 2016). In many cases, in different global locations, there is a resistance by the older generation in transferring the managerial tasks to a younger successor (CONWAY *et al.*, 2017).

However, the aging of the rural population is a reality in different parts of the world (HOWLEY *et al.*, 2012; ZAGATA; SUTHERLAND, 2015; FOGUESATTO *et al.*, 2016; DUESBERG *et al.*, 2017). Aging implies reducing the availability of an individual's workforce, requiring a successor to replace the property manager. In such properties, where succession occurs, the process of slowing down the productivity and acquisition of innovations is reversed, since the tendency is the expansion and diversification of agricultural activities (HARRIS *et al.*, 2012, SOTTOMAYOR *et al.*, 2011; LOBLEY, 2010). However, if succession does not occur, generally the reverse process occurs, i.e., a reduction of business (INWOOD; SHARP, 2012; SOTTOMAYOR *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, discussing succession on farms is an important theme for rural development.

The lack of succession in rural properties in addition to the impacts on production may cause two other disadvantages. The first one refers to the disappearance of the knowledge created and shared by generations that resided in the rural space. The second disadvantage is the purpose of the area, for there may be different views related or not to rural activities

(CARILLO *et al.*, 2013). Even if other owners (individuals or corporations) acquire land without successors and increase their agricultural production scale, it cannot be stated that such gains compensate for the loss of specific human capital existing in each rural property (BERTONI; CAVICCHIOLI, 2016). Thus, we proposed to analyze publications on succession in rural properties, highlighting the relationship between succession and rural development. For this, the proposal of Fink (2010) was used as a framework for the systematic review of peer-reviewed journals.

2 SUCCESSION IN RURAL PROPERTY

It is believed that the first analysis of succession on rural properties occurred in the 1960s. Among the identified results, we noticed that succession influences property management (WHEELER *et al.*, 2012). However, it is necessary to distinguish succession from inheritance. In the first case, the transfer of decision-making on the businesses from local agricultural production must be carried out. In the second case, there is transfer to the heirs of the existing facilities, as well as of the property itself. In many situations, succession and inheritance are destined to a same individual (KEATING, 1996). There are cases where inheritance and succession occur at the same time, possibly due to the occurrence of some family event such as death or illness of the property manager. In other cases, succession is performed in advance of inheritance. In such situations, there are signs of succession planning (BARCLAY *et al.*, 2011).

It should be emphasized that succession does not necessarily need to be conducted by an individual. There is a possibility, when there are different potential successors, of the existence of a shared succession, so that the family enterprise gains advantages in relation to the existence of a mutual trust between managers (CARTER III; KIDWELL, 2014). The possible influences for the occurrence of succession in rural property were identified in four recurrent factors by academic studies: (i) the size of the rural property, (ii) the age of the producer, (iii) the economic results of agricultural production, and (iv) the diversification of production (GASSON; ERRINGTON, 1993; GLAUBEN *et al.*, 2009; MISHRA *et al.*, 2010; BARCLAY *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, succession possibilities are reduced when the heir has a higher formal education (HENNESSY; REHMAN, 2007). However, this reality may change due to the insertion of intelligent agriculture in the rural context. The producer will need to be technologically enabled to carry out rural property management (WOLFERT *et al.*, 2014; WOLFERT *et al.*, 2017).

For the succession to take place, it is necessary for young people to take interest in staying in the countryside and developing work activities related to the properties. In relation to this permanence, two components were identified favoring it: (i) the connection that young people make over the course of their lives with activities carried out on farms, and (ii)

government incentives derived from public policies directed at the permanence of people in rural properties (BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ *et al.*, 2016). However, there are cases in which there are no successors to take over the management of the property. In this situation, problems arise in relation to innovation tendencies and reduction of environmental impacts related to rural production. There are difficulties for rural producers without successors to implement innovations that may increase productivity and the environmental sustainability of production given the lack of perspective of family continuity of rural property (DUESBERG *et al.*, 2017).

It should also be considered that rural producers have difficulties in planning the succession of rural property, as this decision is influenced by various factors such as (i) maintenance of the viability of the business for the successor, (ii) being fair to all children, and (iii) retiring with financial quality (BARCLAY *et al.*, 2011). Other characteristics can be considered in this context: (iv) producers are autonomous and their place of work and housing interact in a same space (RILEY, 2016), (v) they are intimately connected with their activities and the rural property (GASSON, 1973; KUEHNE, 2013; RILEY, 2016), and (vi) the identity of the producer and his status in the community where he resides are defined from work activities (INGRAM; KIRWAN, 2011; RILEY, 2012; KUEHNE, 2013). As a result, producers find it difficult to retire and transfer the management tasks to their successors. Another issue in relation to family succession is that, in places where there are successors within the family, managers nowadays are able to make the transfer of property management easier. If these successors are not family members, there are greater complications in the succession process (RILEY, 2016).

However, in developed countries, there is concern about the aging of the rural population (MILLS-NOVOA, 2011). Population aging and estate succession are thematically related and need to be discussed together. Succession of farmers and aging may affect both the daily lives of people who work in rural properties and food production (OSAWA *et al.*, 2016; LEONARD *et al.*, 2017). In rural areas, the aging of the population is a social problem beyond the issue of retirement, which is common in urban spaces. Public policies directed at this issue, while considered fundamental, are not sufficient to guarantee the well-being of people who grow old in rural areas (JAHN, 2013; SPANEVELLO *et al.*, 2017).

An elderly resident in rural areas needs constant help to get around (MAIR; THIVIERGE-RIKARD, 2010). The physical distances and the quality of the existing infrastructure in the rural area may limit the access of the elderly to social activities (SIEDLECKI *et al.*, 2014; SCHWARZBACH *et al.*, 2014). Thus, this could prevent the elderly from having qualitative social relationships favorable to their mental health (WEDGEWORTH *et al.*, 2016). The importance of family succession is greater than the continuity of agricultural production, also involving the quality of life offered to family predecessors. The aging of rural landowners, the lack of successors to rural properties and the

structuring of the agricultural sector are considered problems related to land use, use efficiency and sustainability (GIANNAKIS; BRUGGEMAN, 2015; LAEPPLÉ; HENNESSY, 2012).

3 METHOD

The organization of this review follows the guidelines made by Fink (2010) for systematic reviews and applied by Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch (2016). It comprises seven stages (Figure 1).

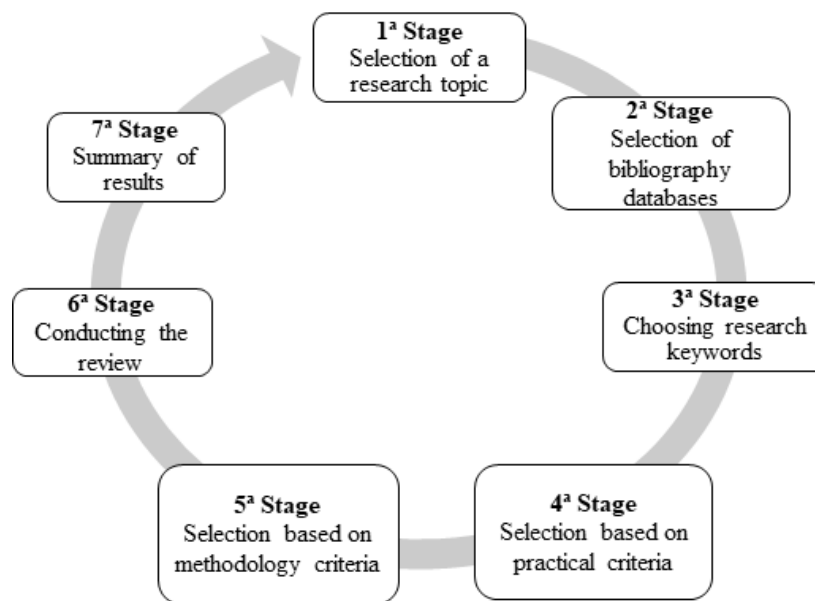


Figure 1. Stages for the development of the Systematic Review
Source: Adapted from Fink (2010).

After the selection of the research topic, we chose the databases (i) *Web of Science*, (ii) *Science Direct* and (iii) *Scopus* using the descriptors "*succession*" and "*farm*" and "*farm succession*" and "*rural development*" to access scientific production related to the subject. In relation to the practical criteria, the selection comprised articles written in English without time limitations. The methodological criteria were selected from peer-reviewed publications made available by academic journals. A total of 347 publications were identified, of which 282 were excluded because they did not address the issue, or because they were listed in more than one database. Thus, 63 publications on family succession were analyzed. The development of the review consists of two steps. The first one refers to bibliometric analysis regarding (i) the period of the publications, (ii) the geographical location of the authors, and (iii) the word cloud. In sequence, we identified the considerations made by the authors about the relationships between succession and rural development.

4 BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Over the years, publications on family succession have increased (Figure 2). 60.3% (38 publications) of the studies analyzed were published in the last 8 years. The increase in the authors' interest in academic production on family succession can be explained by demographic issues such as rural population aging and reduction of the number of children per couple in part of the world. Aging is the moment when there is a need for succession of family businesses, which, in many cases, had not been planned. The reduction in the number of children shows the lack of successors to rural businesses.

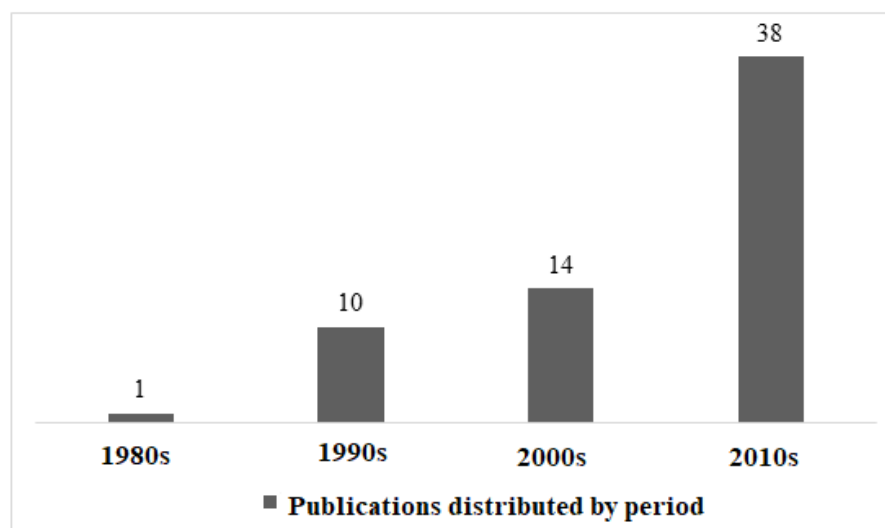


Figure 2. Publications distributed by period

The geographical location of the authors was organized by continent. 70% (44 publications) were from the European continent; among them, approximately 39% come from the United Kingdom. It can be seen that Europe, besides having a tradition in research related to rural production, also has the characteristic of population aging. Both reasons may justify the interest of researchers in succession in properties. Following is the American continent. In this case, there were three countries with academic production on the subject: United States (7 publications), Canada (3 publications) and Brazil (2 publications). The United States and Brazil are considered important countries in world agricultural production. Brazil has records on the rural exodus that occurred in the most recent periods of its history. Thus, research on family succession in the Brazilian countryside should increase considering the importance that agricultural production has for the country's economy.

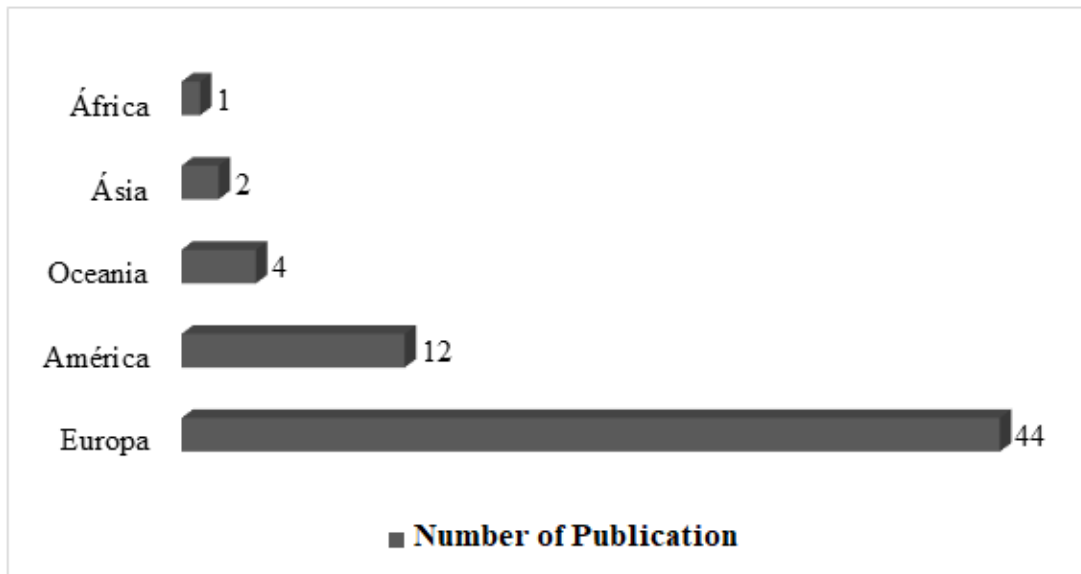


Figure 3. Geographical location of first authors

The word cloud created based on the frequency of words used in the titles of publications indicates two terms with emphasis: *farm* and *family*. Both words represent the research object of researches on succession in rural properties, that is, the succession carried out or not by family properties.



Figure 4. Word Cloud

Family farming is important for agricultural production and for food security (HERRERA *et al.*, 2018). This importance was evidenced after the United Nations Family Farming Year in 2014. The importance of small farmers to food security and the need for measures to strengthen this productive configuration have been recognized (BOSC *et al.*,

2013). Defining the concept of family farming globally is difficult because of the diversity of characteristics in different countries. However, there are elements common among countries, such as (i) the land belongs to the family, (ii) the labor used in the production is totally or mostly familiar labor, and (iii) the family income comes from the rural property. From these characteristics, approximately 90% of the rural properties in the world can be considered family-owned and produce most of the food (BERDEGUÉ; FUENTEALBA, 2011; GRAEUB *et al.*, 2016).

5 RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SUCCESSION

Rural properties are considered as integrating spaces in which work activities are carried out. They are at the same time the residence of individuals. Individuals and their relatives can be considered defenders of the existing tradition in the locality and or in the region, of the agricultural landscape and of conserved areas. The continuity and improvement of developed rural practices will depend on the success of the succession process of a rural property management (BOREC *et al.*, 2013). In this way, succession planning is a facilitator for a successful transfer of management. The benefits of planning relate both to control of economic issues and to family (PITTS *et al.*, 2009). In favorable cases, succession contributes to the continuity of traditional activities developed in rural areas, i.e., food production (POTTER; LOBLEY, 1992). If there is an unsatisfactory succession, different problems may occur. The most serious problem is the family's exit from the rural property and the loss of family trust in relation to the successor (MISHRA *et al.*, 2004).

Therefore, succession in rural space is a complex action that occurs in different ways. It is influenced by individual and economic issues. Thus, the context in which rural property is embedded, as well as the culture of the manager, are elements that influence the way the decision for succession is made. There is a need for public policies encouraging family succession, so that may be young people interested in rural activities. Political incentives should attract these individuals. Things that in principle may represent an individual problem of the rural landowner due to the increase in his/her age may otherwise generate externalities that could result in the stagnation of the land market of a region and a national agricultural sector not compatible with contemporary characteristics (LEONARD *et al.*, 2017).

The relationship between succession, emigration of young people in search of employment opportunities in the urban area, and the aging of the current managers of rural properties can be disadvantages for rural development in view of the lack of successors (MORAIS *et al.*, 2017). In addition, in many patriarchal communities, such as the Western District of Victoria in Australia, farming practices are important to the region and make up the landscape of the place. Young men are considered potential successors. Women, even though

they have the skills and willingness to take over property management, are unable to perform this activity because they are women (LUHRS, 2016). However, in other situations, such as is the case of Norway, women have gained a leading role in rural activities. The female condition for rural activity also depends on cultural issues, which are reflected on how the parents perceive their daughters and educate them based on such perception (BRANDTH; OVERREIN, 2013). Another factor, identified in Nigeria, is related to women's access to financial resources necessary for business management (AROWOLO *et al.*, 2017).

The literature makes considerations about another approach in relation to succession and development. In this case, it is a question of sustainable rural development, considering that producers with more advanced ages are less likely to acquire new technologies (SUESS-REYES; FUETSCH, 2016; DUESBERG *et al.*, 2017). In addition, succession of rural property management also influences how the existing resources in the area are used. Natural resources are used to a greater or lesser extent, with or without measures to reduce environmental impacts, according to the decision of the manager (WARD; LOWE, 1994). The tendency is for agricultural production to be increasingly encouraged to use innovations and strategies that respond to market needs in relation to ecological issues. Thus, the leaders of productive units had to adapt to these issues to the respective realities (SUESS-REYES; FUETSCH, 2016).

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Discussing succession in rural properties has gained more and more visibility in the literature related to the rural space, particularly in European countries, where the population leading the properties has a higher average age. To a lesser extent, it is noted that in other global locations, there are researchers indicating the need to know and study problems related to succession in properties. In this way, in places where there is agricultural production, discussions can be promoted, so that the regional context can be known and at the same time producers have access to information related to succession planning.

The process of succession is complex due to the influence of economic, social and cultural variables and the difficulty of the current manager in understanding the need to reduce and subsequently stop his/her work activities and the desire of his/her heir in having another profession. However, dialogue and exchange of experiences between producers and potential successors are resources that may help in an understanding between the current manager, the possible successor and the rural property. The intimacy between these three elements may contribute to the success of the succession. Failure in this process may cause different negative outcomes for both family members and economic relationships, causing changes in the family context and the family way of life. In this way, the succession process

must be carried out in the long term from the sharing of business information, contemplating a respectful relationship between the factors identified.

Even though a few issues are raised in relation to rural development and succession, the discussions that relate these issues can move forward. They can indicate, for example, that the problem of succession is beyond food production performed in the rural space. Some references are possible to be identified in the literature. Questions regarding the existing knowledge in properties, the way of life of the individuals, among other characteristics, can be discussed. However, discussions can move forward in order to demonstrate different global contexts and contributions that succession has brought to the quality of life of local residents, in addition to how education may contribute to rural productive performance, considering environmental issues and food production that cause less impact to the use of technologies that speeds up the decision-making of rural managers.

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